

ICJA

Inspires

Annual Report 5786 / 2025–2026
IDA CROWN JEWISH ACADEMY

Leadership **inspiring** the next generation

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Table of Contents

Letter from the Dean	3
!Excellence in Limudei Kodesh	3
ICJA Inspires Torah and Character	4-5
ICJA Inspires Intellectual Excellence	6-7
ICJA Inspires Passion for Israel	8-9
ICJA Inspires Community and Social-Emotional Well-Being.....	10-11
ICJA Inspires Creativity.....	12-13
ICJA Inspires Athletic Teamwork.....	14-15
Institutional Advancement.....	16
Grandparents Giving Circle	17
Annual Campaign Donors	18-21
Financial Summary.....	22

Excellence in Limudei KODESH

Dear ICJA Family,

A word keeps surfacing as I reflect on this year at Ida Crown Jewish Academy.

Inspiration.

Not as an abstraction. Not as a meaningless motto inscribed above a doorway. But as a living, breathing force, something I witness every day, in classrooms and the hallways, on the courts and fields, in moments of tefillah, and moments of genuine growth.

Because this was a year in which our students did not wait to be inspired - they created it.

Consider what student initiative alone has built. Young men and women who choose, each morning, to begin their day with Daf Yomi, Nach Yomi, and Shnayim Mikra - not because they were required to, but because they understood that learning is a privilege worth waking up for. Our ICGC and ICBC cultivated a culture where Torah is not a subject to be mastered but a way of life to be embraced. And alongside that - Bikur Cholim, Mahjong with seniors, Babka & Bubbies, Keshet, Yachad, and so much more - all examples of chesed not merely taught, but lived by teenagers who looked at the world and decided to make it better.

Academically, ICJA continues to offer over 200 class sections daily on multiple levels. Two students earned Commended National Merit Scholar recognition. Seven were named Illinois State Scholars. Every student who entered Letters About Literature received recognition. Our Debate Team found its voice and qualified for national finals, our Creative Writing Club channeled vision into language, and our Lifnai U'Lifnim and Mechanchim programming created relational depth that defines what it means to be not merely a student, but a mensch.

Our athletes competed with excellence and spirit; Wrestling triumphed again at Wittenberg, Lady Cross Country Aces as Regional Champions, Girls' Varsity Basketball capturing the Conference Tournament, Boys' Varsity Basketball claiming both the Chicago Prep Conference title and Regionals, and Aces Coach Jonathan Rich was named Coach of the Year.

And then there is Religious Zionism - a belief that this year carried particular weight and particular beauty. When students in Hebrew class interviewed the families of fallen Israeli soldiers, they were bearing witness. When ICJA helped lead the JUF Yom HaAtzmaut ceremony in downtown Chicago, we stood as representatives of a community that understands Jewish pride is not incidental to education but central to it.

That is inspiration, made manifest.

All of it, every achievement, every act of chesed, every moment of growth—is the living expression of what we envision as our calling: inspiring Bnei and Bnot Torah to thrive in the modern world. Not to survive it. Not merely to navigate it. To thrive with Torah as their compass and inspiration as their fuel.

None of this happens without you. Your partnership is not merely support. It is the condition that makes everything else possible.

Thank you for believing in our students and in the school they build, year by year, with their brilliance, their kindness, and their boundless capacity to inspire.



B'virkat HaTorah,

Rabbi Leonard A. Matanky

Rabbi Leonard A. Matanky
Dean, Ida Crown Jewish Academy

ICJA Inspires Torah and Character

At ICJA, students develop:

- Ahavat Torah – a deep love of Torah learning
- Ahavat Am Yisrael – a strong connection to the Jewish people
- Ahavat Eretz Yisrael – a passion for the Land and State of Israel

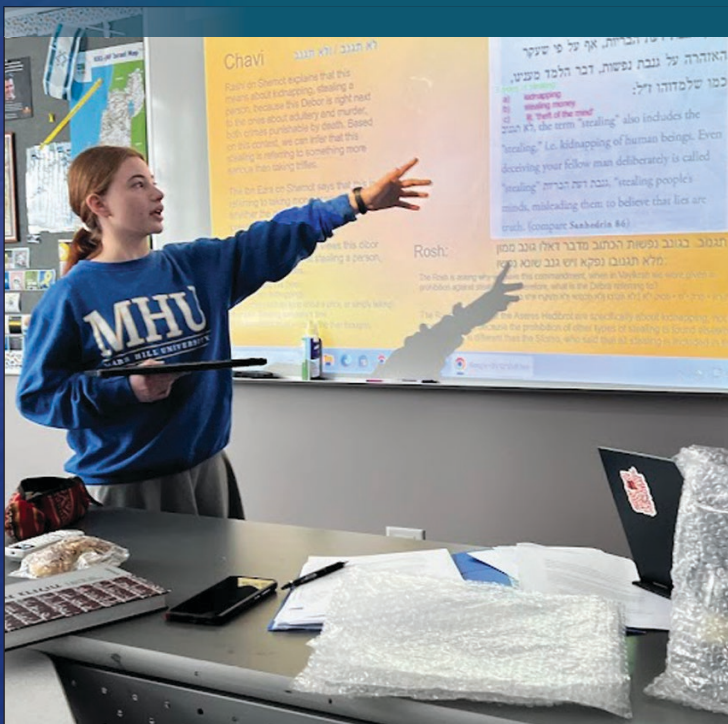
Inspiring Girls' Torah Learning

- ICJA girls pursue serious Torah study through multiple tracks, including Talmud and the Advanced Jewish Studies Program (AJSP), while building vibrant learning communities beyond the classroom.
- Throughout the year, students lead Rosh Chodesh chaburot, participate in monthly Shabbat "Shtieg" programs, and gather weekly for Tehillim and Torah study.
- The Ida Crown Girls Club (ICGC) organizes speakers, Yom Tov programming, and learning opportunities that deepen students' connection to Torah and community.

Inspiring Boys' Torah Learning

- ICJA boys immerse themselves in rigorous Talmud study through specialized tracks and daily multi-period Gemara classes.
- More than 50 students participated in weekly in optional Mishmar learning.
- Students participate in Oneg Shabbat singing and learning in school on Friday mornings.
- Sunday father-son Veshinantam Levanecha program brings freshmen boys and relatives to a different shul each week for davening, breakfast, and learning.
- Ida Crown Boys Club (ICBC) events which combine Torah study with community experiences.
- Student-led Daf Yomi Club supports students undertaking Daf Yomi.

92% of seniors continue their Torah growth in Israel after graduation, supported by faculty guidance throughout the yeshiva and seminary application process.



Students have opportunities for:

- Weekly morning learning with the YU Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago
- Student-led Shnayim Mikra Club
- Shabbatonim that combine learning and community
- "Fridaytons" featuring davening, dinner, a shiur, and tisch
- Chanukah and Pre-Chagim (holiday) learning programs with the YU Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago
- Freshmen Haggadah Project integrating Torah learning and original divrei Torah
- ICJA's Chidon HaTanach team competed in the National Chidon HaTanach Finals
- Multiple school minyanim



ICJA's Nach Yomi Club inspired many students this year. Rebbetzin Dr. Adina Shmidman, Director of the OU Women's Initiative, visited ICJA to celebrate the completion of the Nach Yomi cycle.



Learning with Mechanchim



Veshinantem Levanecha, vatikin davening at the lake

“I appreciate the opportunity to build relationships with teachers beyond the classroom at Ida Crown.” – Alyssa Blumberg '26

ICJA Inspires Intellectual Excellence

ICJA inspires students to love learning. Through innovative curriculum design, differentiated instruction, and 21st-century pedagogy, each student receives the support and challenge needed to thrive.

With more than 200 classes offered daily, a 1:5 teacher-student ratio, and 13 Advanced Placement courses, students benefit from both individualized attention and rigorous academics.

Beyond the classroom, more than 60 clubs and teams allow students to pursue interests in science, literature, debate, medicine, mathematics, and public policy.

ICJA provides in-house academic support in all subjects. Recent achievements include:

- Caleb Novick '27 – 3rd place, Jerusalem Science Contest (aerospike rocket engines)
- Josh Miller '26 and Kinneret Finegold '27 – Springboard Chicago "18 Under 18"
- 25 seniors inducted into the National Honor Society, Torah Chapter
- ICJA's literary journal Charlotte's Web earned the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) "Excellent" designation, the organization's highest honor. The journal is supported by the Susan and Joseph Ament z"l Fund.
- Nine students obtained qualifications to become EMTs, with many others completing first aid training through the Hugo's Heroes Club.
- Mrs. Lynn Kraft, Tanach Department Chair, received First Place in the 2025–2026 Hartman Family Foundation Educator Award.
- Levi Madoff '27 earned Honorable Mention at Model UN, representing Russia in discussions on nuclear power in space and the lunar space race.
- Seniors Aiden Rich and Devorah Kaplowitz were named Commended Scholars by the National Merit Scholarship Program.
- 7 seniors were named Illinois State Scholars (Yedidya Bechhofer, Zachary Fogel, Ami Gavant, Devorah Kaplowitz, Jack Marshall, Benjamin Rosenberg, Jonah Strahlberg).
- 8 seniors received School Recognition Awards from the College Board (Yedidya Bechhofer, Zachary Fogel, Ami Gavant, Devorah Kaplowitz, Jack Marshall, Natan Miller, Aiden Rich, Benjamin Rosenberg)

Penina Benjamin '26.
First Place winner in the
National Chidon HaTanach
competition 12th Grade
Division



Academic Team Highlights:

- All members of ICJA's student-led Chidon HaTanach Team qualified for this year's Nationals. Penina Benjamin '26 won 1st Place in Chidon HaTanach National Competition. Arielle Martin Shafir '29 placed 20th and Ayelet Klein '27 placed 23rd in the nation.
- 7 Illinois State Scholars.
- ICJA's new Debate Team debuted this year and racked up local victories.
- Eliana Frankel '27 qualified for the National Speech & Debate Tournament. Debate Coach Ben Schneider won Best Coach Award.
- Mathletes won 2nd place in regionals.



ICJA by the NUMBERS

250 STUDENTS

1:5 TEACHER-STUDENT RATIO

200+ CLASSES OFFERED

DAILY 60+ CLUBS AND TEAMS

13 AP COURSES

50+ STUDENTS IN WEEKLY MISHMAR

9 STUDENT EMTS CERTIFIED

25 NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY MEMBERS

- 2 STUDENTS NAMED 18 UNDER 18
- 2 STUDENTS RECOGNIZED BY THE NATIONAL COLLEGE BOARD
- 23 STUDENTS RECOGNIZED BY *Letters About Literature*
- 8 STUDENTS RECEIVED COLLEGE BOARD RECOGNITION AWARDS

ICJA wishes farewell to retiring English teacher Marsha Arons. For over 20 years, Mrs. Arons inspired students in her classroom and also served as faculty advisor to ICJA's award-winning Charlotte's Web literary magazine. Mrs. Arons created ICJA's popular Film and Drama class, taught Public Speaking, and served as faculty advisor to ICJA's Creative Writing Club. Mrs. Arons supported and nurtured an entire generation of students as they grew to love exploring literature in all its forms.



Marsha Arons

“I will always remember how I discovered my love of Torah through my teachers and classes at Ida Crown.”
– Mina Brandes '26

ICJA Inspires Passion for Israel

ICJA inspires students to develop a deep and enduring connection to Am Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael, and Torat Yisrael.

- Students engage meaningfully with Israel's history, society, and current challenges through coursework, clubs, and hands-on advocacy training.
- Israel Advocacy Club equips students with the knowledge and confidence to educate peers and respond thoughtfully to misinformation.
- AIPAC-led workshops helped juniors and seniors gain skills in navigating complex and often challenging conversations about Israel.
- All-school field trip to Nova Exhibit in Chicago - students learned about the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks and heard directly from survivors, deepening their understanding and personal connection.
- Cross Country Team's Run for Israel, organized in partnership with StandWithUs, raised over \$6,000 for Magen David Adom.

- Students Zoomed with families of fallen soldiers in Hebrew classes in the weeks before Yom HaZikaron, learning their stories and making their loss personal.
- Yom HaZikaron – students educated their peers about fallen soldiers after forging personal connections with their families. *ICJA's Yom HaZikaron observance is generously sponsored by the Zenia and Jeffrey Cohen Fund*
- Chicago's community-wide Yom HaAtzmaut celebration at Daley Plaza – ICJA students helped lead the ceremony through tefillot.

“

"I had the chance to listen to family members of two fallen soldiers. It was really impactful to hear not only how they died, but how they lived, and about the heroism they displayed, even in their very last moments." – Maayan Engel '27, after ICJA's Yom HaZikaron tekes (ceremony)

”

- ICJA's Yom HaAtzmaut chagigah featured music, dancing, and joy, reflecting the strong connection our students feel to the State of Israel. *ICJA's Yom HaAtzmaut programming is generously sponsored by the Gertz family in memory of Doris and Paul Rosenberg z'l.*



Israel Comes to ICJA

This year, ICJA welcomed a range of distinguished speakers and visitors from Israel, giving students the opportunity to engage directly with leading voices and firsthand perspectives, including:

- Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon, Rav, Gush Etzion and Nasi of World Mizrahi
- Rebbetzin Dr. Adina Shmidman, Director of the OU Women's Initiative
- Rabbi Doron Perez, Executive Chairman of the Mizrahi World Movement and President of the World Zionist Organization
- Rav Menachem Liebttag, Rav at Har Etzion and global educator
- Yair Agmon and Oriya Mevorach, authors of the book *One Day in October*
- Ted Deutch, former Congressman and current CEO of the American Jewish Committee
- Residents of Kibbutz Nir Oz: Ron Bahat, Yuval Bazer, Liat Algaresi, and Ola Metzger
- Ofer Bavly, JUF Israel Office Director General
- 40 shlichim from the World Zionist Organization's Education Department, visited ICJA to observe a model school and engage with our students
- Israeli teenagers participating in the JUF-Jewish Agency for Israel program Partnership Together



Yair Agmon and Oriya Mevorach



“

I knew before coming to Ida Crown that I wanted to make aliyah, but ICJA kept that dream alive. The school celebrated Israel in every aspect of student life, from Yom Ha'atzmaut to encouraging a meaningful fifth year in Israel, making Israel not just an idea but a lived value. That environment shaped my identity, strengthened my commitment to Torah and learning, and ultimately gave me the confidence to build my life in Israel. – Liat Mott '20, who is currently pursuing a BA at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

”

ICJA Inspires Community and Social-Emotional Well-Being

ICJA is more than a school—it is a community where students feel supported, connected, and inspired to become their best selves. Our professional team provides guidance across academic, social, emotional, college-planning, and religious growth areas.

Support Services

Our licensed therapists—**Rebecca Bromberg, MSW, LCSW, Director of Student Social Services**, and **Julie Avner, MPS, LPC, ATR, Social Services Counselor**—build meaningful relationships with students. Located adjacent to the cafeteria, their offices provide a welcoming and accessible space for support.

Academic Services

Led by **Director Marisa Loebmann, MA, LBS-I**, the Academic Services team supports diverse learning needs. Resource

rooms near the Learning Commons offer a structured, supportive environment where students can work, meet with teachers, and access learning specialists.

REACH Partnership

Through Associated Talmud Torah's REACH program (Resources for Educational Achievement Collaboration and Health), ICJA provides data-driven tools, professional development, and expanded student services.

Lifnai U'Lifnim

This monthly program for freshmen fosters self-awareness, empathy, and strong interpersonal skills. Adapted from a program developed at Yeshivat Mekor Chaim, it helps students navigate social dynamics while strengthening their connection to Torah values.

Mechanchim

ICJA's Mechanchim are Jewish educators who serve as guidance counselors, building relationships with every student. Mechanchim plan fun and educational programming, and are available every day to speak and learn with students and discuss students' individual spiritual goals.

Additional initiatives include:

- Erika's Lighthouse Mental Health Awareness Club
- Therapy dog visits during the year and exam periods
- In-school Art Therapy sessions helping students relax and recharge

“If you ever feel disillusioned about the future, spend time at ICJA. The students' positivity and enthusiasm show that the future of our community is in excellent hands.” – Jonathan Roth, Director of Operations, The Ark

ICJA Inspires Community

ICJA fosters a culture of connection, responsibility, and chesed. The **All-School Retreat**, generously supported by Leslie '81 and Tom '81 Silverstein, brought students and faculty together for two days at Camp Chi, strengthening relationships through shared experiences of learning, tefillah, sports, and outdoor activities.

Every ICJA student completes a minimum of 80 hours of chesed before graduation. Five students were inducted into the Debra L. Katzin Memorial Chesed Society, recognizing those who completed over 250 hours.

Signature Chesed Initiatives:

- **Keshet Peer Buddies** – building friendships and inclusion through shared activities
- **Babka & Bubbies** – weekly visits to Park Plaza, combining baking, singing, and meaningful intergenerational connection
- **Mahjong Club at Park Plaza** – fostering relationships through shared leisure and conversation
- **Chesed Day** – school-wide volunteerism supporting organizations such as Yachad, The Chicago Center, The Ark, and more

ICJA's Mahjong Club plays with residents at Park Plaza on Sunday morning.
“I enjoy playing Mahjong with my mom every Shabbos, and it's been meaningful to build relationships with residents at Park Plaza through the game.” – Avi Friedman '28



Yom HaShoah Programming

The **Mobile Museum of Tolerance**, presented in partnership with the **Simon Wiesenthal Center**, provided powerful educational programming on antisemitism and racism.

Alumna Alison Pure-Slovin '75, Midwest Director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, joined children of Holocaust survivors Miriam Starck Miller and Howard Reich in conversation about their parents' experiences and how those stories shaped their lives.

Sponsored in memory of Rabbi Shlomo Hirsch Koller, hy"d and his sister Etka Koller-Cykornik, hy"d, by Sharon and Seymour Gertz and the estate of Margalit bat Rav Shilem Gertz z"l.



Chanukah Programming

- YU Torah Mitzion Kollel Yom Iyun with hands-on learning
- School-wide chagigot
- Ruach-filled davening and Chanukiyah lighting
- Learning and breakfast in teachers' homes
- Special classroom programming



Masliansky Awards

Student Sarah Leonard '27 received this year's Masliansky Award for "bringing a sense of joy to the school and whose actions encourage others to be involved in student learning and activities."

ICJA teacher Rabbi Shmuel Oren, received this year's Masliansky Award "for going above and beyond for our school and students."

Susan and Ronnie Masliansky and the Masliansky Family established the award in memory of Joseph and Tsippora Masliansky, a"h, who firmly believed in Jewish education and the power of one person to make a difference in the lives of others.



Sarah Leonard '27



Rabbi Shmuel Oren



ICJA Inspires Creativity

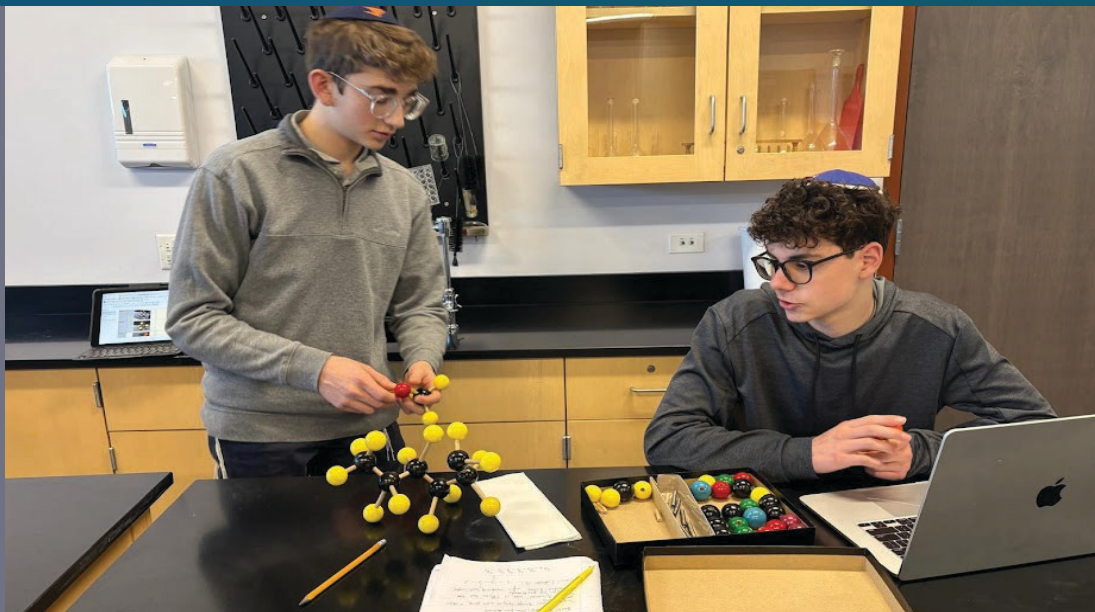
Creativity is an integral part of the ICJA experience, expressed through both academic programs and extracurricular opportunities.

ICJA Takes the Stage

This signature event empowered students to design and produce an evening of song, dance, fashion, and Torah. Performing before a packed audience, students demonstrated creativity, confidence, and collaboration. A related Day of Learning explored the concept of b'tzelem Elokim, combining Torah study with hands-on workshops, including sessions on fashion design and creative expression.

- All sophomores take either Art or Band, with many continuing into advanced courses.
- Graphic Design introduced professional design principles.
- Film and Drama taught storytelling and critical viewing skills.
- Public Speaking imparted confidence and communication skills.
- The new Creative Writing Club was so popular that multiple new sections had to be added
- Classroom projects integrated art, including recreating illuminated Jewish manuscripts, composing poetry, and creating virtual museums in Jewish History.
- Dramatic performances across disciplines, including Julius Caesar, Hamlet, and an original Hebrew-language Purim play, built creativity and artistic expression.
- In STEM-Engineering students designed and built original complex electronic devices.





ICJA Inspires Athletic Teamwork

Wrestling

- The Wrestling Aces continued their dominance, winning the Wittenberg Wrestling Tournament for the third consecutive year and setting a new record for total wins in the tournament's history.
- Ari Shyovitz '28 made school history by qualifying for the State Championship—the first ICJA wrestler to do so.

Beyond competition, our Wrestling team emphasizes character and community:

- Team davens shacharit before early morning practices
- Chesed initiatives, including food deliveries before holidays
- Shared experiences such as a Purim Seudah and Shabbaton



Basketball

- Lady Aces were Conference Tournament Champions, with Esther Fretzin '26 named Conference MVP.
- Boys Varsity Aces won the Chicago Prep Conference.
- Boys Varsity Aces were Regional Championship winners.
- Boys Varsity Aces won their Tournament Championship.
- Boys JV Aces reached Conference Quarterfinals.
- Aces' Coach Jonathan Rich '95, was named Conference Coach of the Year



Cross Country

- Lady Running Aces were Regional Champions.
- Both Boys and Girls Running Aces qualified for Sectionals.
- Elisheva Deangelis '26 won 1st Place in the Yeshiva League Girls' Cross Country Meet.
- Aaron Katz '26 won 4th Place in the Yeshiva League Boys' Cross Country Meet.



ICJA Aces continued to shine with Girls' Soccer, Boys' Soccer, Baseball, and Fencing enjoying fun seasons building teamwork and camaraderie.



ICJA Institutional Advancement

Annual Scholarship Campaign

Through the engagement and generosity of our ICJA community, ICJA's Annual Scholarship Campaign surpassed our goal and raised more than \$1.7 million, reaffirming our commitment that no student will be denied the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive at ICJA because of financial need. Over 60% of ICJA students receive financial assistance from our Annual Scholarship Fund each year.

This remarkable achievement is made possible through a year-long series of fundraising and engagement initiatives, including class reunions, our Alumni Campaign, the SOP Event, Grandparents Day, and the annual Dr. Edward A. Crown Scholarship Dinner, which bring together alumni, parents, grandparents, and friends in support of ICJA's mission.

**SURPASSED
OUR GOAL!**

RAISED MORE THAN
\$1.7 MILLION.



THANK YOU TO
OUR DONORS!

Scholarship Dinner Honorees

Julie and Nathan Thomas – Crown Leadership Award
Melissa and Dr. Harris Perlman – Crown Service Award
Tirza Kahan – Educator of the Year

Julie and Nathan
Thomas



Melissa and
Dr. Harris Perlman



Tirza Kahan



Scan QR codes to view tribute videos.



ICJA Class of 2015 Reunion



Our Society of Patrons (SOP) enables ICJA to meet our Scholarship Campaign goals. SOPs enjoy an annual exclusive event to forge deeper connections with our mission and with each other, a community of deeply dedicated stakeholders in our school.

This year, SOPs enjoyed a hilarious evening with comedian Dovi Neuberger.



Scan these QR codes to watch our 3 part "In the Playroom" videos supporting our 2026 Alumni and Friends Campaign, produced by Dovi Neuberger and Eli Lebowicz's '07:



Grandparents' Giving Circle



ICJA's Grandparents play a crucial role in the lives of their grandchildren and in our school. Our Grandparents' Giving Circle provides financial and emotional support for our students, strengthening our school and showing students that commitment to Jewish learning is a lifelong value.

All grandparent contributions ensure that ICJA will be able to offer a vibrant Jewish education to generations of students. We thank those grandparents who contributed to our Grandparents' Giving Circle this year by making a gift to our Annual Campaign.



Grandparents who have given to the 2025-2026 Annual Campaign

Maureen Alt
Beth and Bradley Alter
David Arfa
Marsha and Rick Arons
Deborah and Abraham Bajtner
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Merle and Marty Wolfensohn
Moshe and Marcy Yavor
Rhonda and Alan Zahtz

2026 Annual Campaign Donors

Thank you to all of our donors for contributing over \$1.7 million to our ICJA Annual Campaign.

\$25,000 and above

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Linda & Stanley Weissbrot

Chellie & Dr. Yankee Wilensky
Debbie & Rabbi Shabsai Wolfe
Zell Family Foundation

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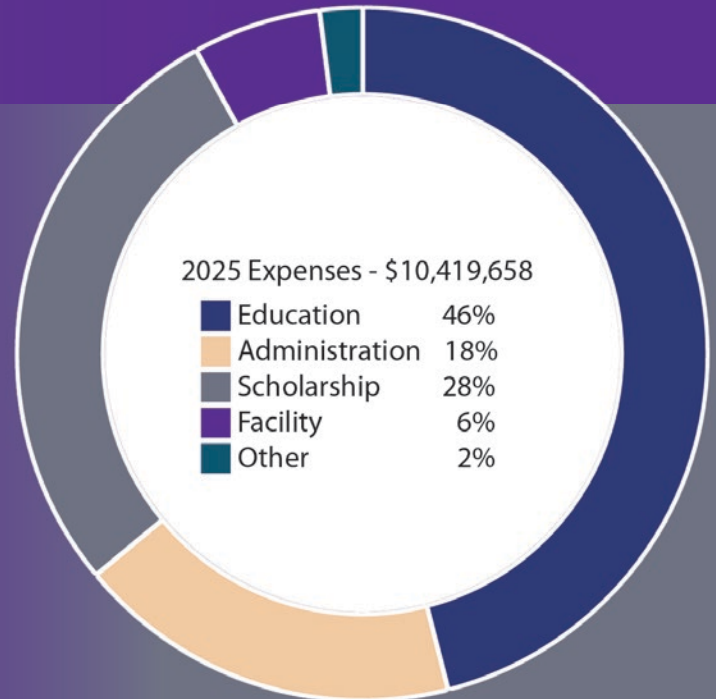
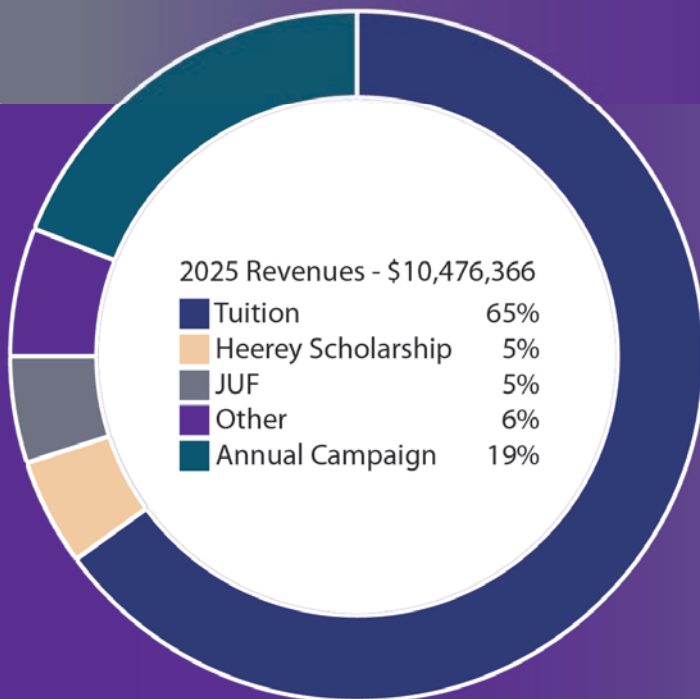
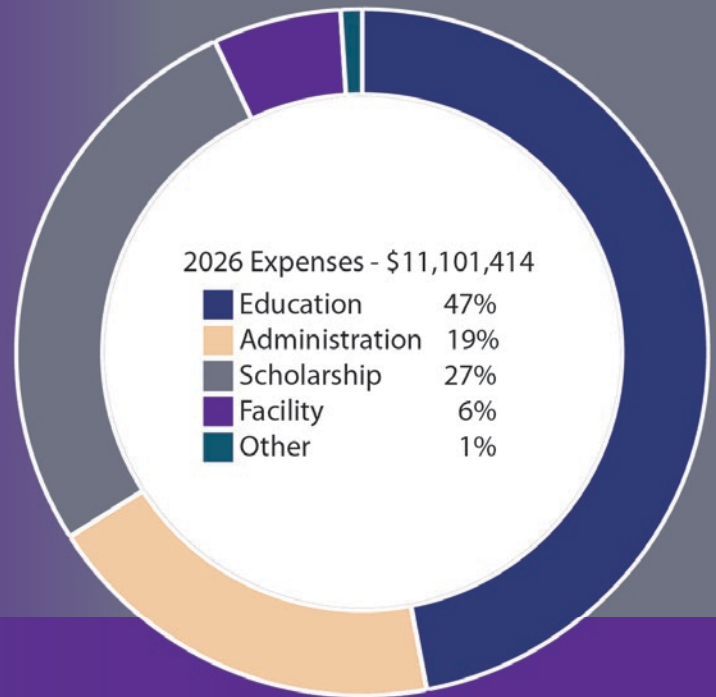
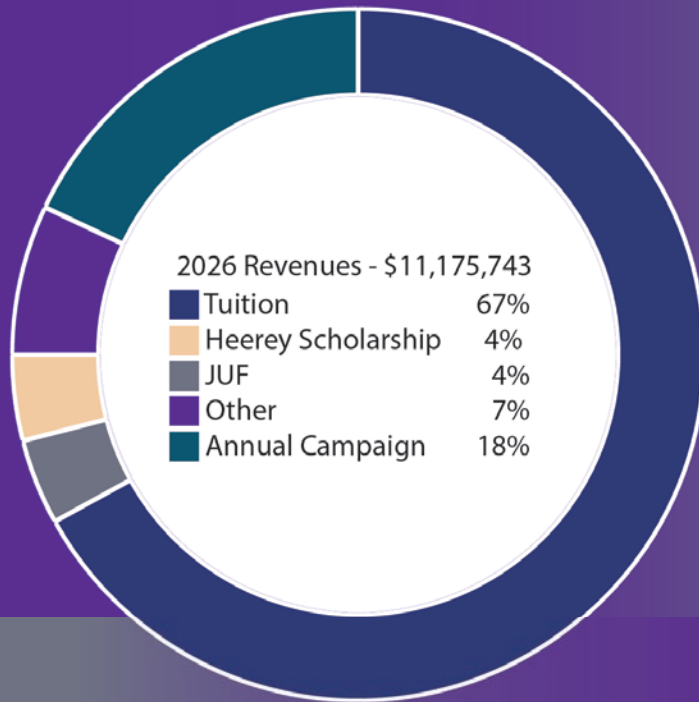
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